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Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 AID-05 COME-00 XMB-02 TRSE-00

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---------- 066237
R 210220Z JAN 76
FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 743

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: BEXP, NZ
SUBJECT: PILOT PLANT FOR U.S. DESIGNED FUEL CELL

1. OFFICIALS OF BP NEW ZEALAND LTDMN A MAJOR MARKETER OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS CONTROLLED BY OVERSEAS INTERESTS HAVE DISCUSSED PLANS FOR A NEW ZEALAND PILOT PLANT USING A U.S. DEVELOPED FUEL CELL. THE OBJECT IS TO TEST A CELL DEVELOPED BY THE UNITED TECHNOLOGY CENTER, AN AFFILIATE OF THE UNITED AIRCRAFT CORP. UNDER LOCAL CONDITIONS.

2. BP OFFICIALS ADVISE THEY ARE SHORT ON CASH FOR THE PROJECT AND HAVE ASKED THEEMBASSY TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF OBTAIING USG FUNDS IN THE FORM OF A "GRANT" TO ASSIST IN ESTABLISHING AND OPERATING THE PILOT PLANT. A SUM OF US$5 MILLION HAS BEEN SUGGESTED. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT UNITED TECHNOLOGY HAS RECEIVED A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF USG FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE R AND D PROGRAM FOR THE FUEL CELL. APPARENTLY BP HAS NOT DISCUSSED THE SUBJECT OF A "GRANT" OF FUNDS FOR THIS PROJECT WITH UNITED TECHNOLOGY.

3. DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN BP AND THE EMBASSY'S COMATT HAVE BEEN HAMPERED BY A RELUCTANCE TO IMPORT HARD INFORMATION AND AN ATTITUDE OF EXTREME CAUTION DISPLAYED BY COMPANY OFFICIALS WHO SEEM QUITE CONCERNED THAT OTHER COMPANIES MAY DISCOVER BP'S PLANS AND "STEAL A MARCH" ON THE PROJECT. EFFORTS TO BRING THE DISCUSSION DOWN TO THE LEVEL
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OF A COMMERCIAL VENTURE SUCH AS WHETHER RAISING EXIM

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FINANCING MIGHT BE A FEASIBLE APPROACH HAVE BEEN FRUITLESS.

4. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT ANY AVAILABLE USG FINANCING SHOULD BE GRANTED TO THE AMERICAN PARTNER IN SUCH A VENTURE OR TO A PROGRAM SUCH AS THE EXISTING ONE FOR U.S./N.Z. ENERGY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT RATHER THAN TO A THIRD COUNTRY COMPANY. WE DO NO, HOWEVER, WISH TO OVERLOOK OR DENIGRATE BP'S ROLE IN INITIATING ACTION IN A PROGRAM WHICH COULD LEAD TO AN IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF ENERGY FOR NEW ZEALAND WHILE ALSO LEADING TO SUBSTANTIAL EXPORT SALES OF U.S. EQUIPMENT.

5. EMBASSY WELL APPRECIATE DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND USDOC EFFORTS TO DISCREETLY ASCERTAIN FROM UNITED TECHNOLOGY WHITHER THIS IS A CONCRETE PROPOSAL AND, IF SO, WHAT ROLE THE U.S. COMPANY IS PREPARED TO PLAY IN ESTABLISHING A FUEL CELL PILOT PLANT IN NEW ZEALAND.
KILLGORE

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